



Region 1
490 N. Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901

**Decision Notice
and
Finding of No Significant Impact
for
BLANCHARD LAKE
FISHING ACCESS SITE
PROPOSED IMPROVEMENT
Environmental Assessment**

January 14, 2014

Description of the Proposed Action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is proposing site improvements at Blanchard Lake Fishing Access Site (FAS). Proposed improvements include developing an upper parking area along Blanchard Lake Drive, developing a trail between the upper parking area and the existing lower parking area, installing additional signs and an automatic entrance gate, and improving the drainage of the access road and boat ramp. The 10-acre Blanchard Lake FAS has been a popular recreational site since its acquisition by FWP in 1962. The FAS is conveniently located less than 2 miles southwest of Whitefish near residential developments and Whitefish Lake Golf Course on Blanchard Lake. The site provides quality recreational opportunities for fishing, boating, floating, and wildlife viewing. Due to increased use, the existing small parking lot is inadequate to accommodate the increased visitor use of the site. As a result, visitors are often forced to park on Blanchard Lake Drive and then walk down the narrow access road, which has poor visibility for vehicles, causing safety concerns. In addition, the access road and boat ramp have eroded, causing sedimentation of the lake and an uneven surface from which to launch boats.

Public Comment:

FWP accepted public comment on the draft environmental assessment (EA) for a 30-day period, from August 15, 2013, through September 14, 2013. The EA was advertised through media releases and legal notices in the Daily Inter Lake, Helena Independent Record, and FWP web page. Copies of the EA were available from the Kalispell FWP office, on the FWP web site, and at the Montana State Library and the Flathead County Libraries. Seventeen comments were received, with ten in favor of the proposal and four against the proposal. Three comments were neutral and provided specific suggestions.

Response to Comments:

Comment: The improved parking area would be attractive to after-hours use, overnight camping, and other illegal activity that is disruptive to residents.

Response: This is a concern, whether or not the proposed improvements are made. Regulations will be posted on-site and will be enforced by local law enforcement agencies and FWP game wardens. The improved parking area would be placed on the north end of the property as far away from the closest neighbor as possible. An automatic gate could be installed that would discourage after-hours use.

Comment: The proposed improvements would make the lake more accessible to larger motor boats, resulting in an increase in noise and lakeshore erosion.

Response: The proposed improvement would not actually increase the size of the existing boat ramp to accommodate larger boats. They would simply fix the existing drainage problems and provide a smoother surface. A 200-ft no-wake zone is in place on the lake and will be enforced as necessary.

Comment: The improvements would increase traffic on Blanchard Lake Drive, negatively impacting local residents and wildlife.

Response: The proposed improvements do not actually add more parking at the FAS. They simply provide a designated parking area for vehicles that are currently forced to park along the side of Blanchard Lake Drive. We think that this will be safer for visitors, residents, and wildlife.

Comment: The proposed improvements would increase use, making the lake more vulnerable to Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) including Eurasian Water milfoil, which has been found on nearby Beaver Lake.

Response: Aquatic Invasive Species are currently a concern, and we do not expect a significant increase in exposure as a result of the proposed actions. The proposal does not expand the capacity of the FAS, but provides a designated parking area for vehicles that are currently forced to park on the side of Blanchard Lake Drive. FWP manages a state-wide AIS prevention program that includes check stations, education, signage, and enforcement. The FAS will be posted with AIS educational signage that is consistent throughout the state.

Comment: The current situation with parking makes it difficult to launch a boat with a trailer and needs to be addressed.

Response: FWP acknowledges that the parking and turn-around area at the lake is narrow. The proposed actions will not affect this condition.

Comment: I support the improvement, but 10:00 p.m. is too early to close the gate in the summer.

Response: FWP proposes installing an automatic gate and may have some flexibility on closing times.

Comment: We support the improvement and would like to suggest adding a dock and bench seat to the FAS.

Response: FWP thanks you for the comment, but at this time those additional improvements are not being proposed.

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI):


Based on the analysis in the environmental assessment (EA), I find Alternative B to be the preferred alternative. I have evaluated the EA and applicable laws, regulations, and policies and have determined that this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

Alternative B - Proposed Action:

In order to improve parking and public safety concerns and reduce resource degradation, FWP proposes to develop an upper parking area along Blanchard Lake Drive, a trail between the upper parking area and the existing lower parking area, and install additional signs and an automatic entrance gate. In addition, FWP proposes to improve the drainage of the access road and boat ramp.

The final EA may be viewed at or obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region One, 490 N. Meridian Road, Kalispell, MT 59901. Please direct requests and questions to:

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January 15, 2014

James R. Satterfield Jr., Ph.D.
Regional Supervisor

Date